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## Research in Schools: Challenges and Lessons Learned

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# Research in Schools - Challenges and Lessons Learned

**The Centre for Effective Education (CEE)** has developed considerable expertise in the use of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in education and has undertaken more of these than any other educational research centre in Europe. To date, the CEE has successfully completed 19 RCTs and has a further 14 currently running. Together, these trials have involved 827 schools/educational settings and over 37,017 children and young people. CEE specialises in large-scale evaluations, longitudinal research and evidence synthesis in education. [www.qub.ac.uk/cee](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cee)

### Challenges and lessons learned

**Challenge: School recruitment**  
*Lesson learned:*

- Use a partner organisation if possible
- Ensure schools fully understand the reason for the study, the methods that will be employed and what signing up means for the school, children and parents. This can be achieved by:
  - The research team organising/attending information sessions about the intervention and/or study
  - Asking schools to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which clearly specifies the schools commitment to the research and the research team's commitment to the school

**Challenge: School retention**  
*Lesson learned:*

- It is important to maintain regular contact with participating schools. This can be done by:
  - Sharing updates of findings in a user friendly format
  - Ensuring that schools receive sufficient advance warning and information about forthcoming data collection sweeps
  - Holding showcase events within six months of each data collection sweep to invite school personnel and pupils to share in the dissemination of findings and hear about current research issues from invited speakers

**Challenge: Relying on teachers (who have limited time and resources) to complete outcome measures**  
*Lesson learned:*

- It is essential that teacher time is adequately costed into a study's budget so that teachers have the necessary freedom and time to complete measures
- This promotes the view that teacher time is valued by the research team and the data being collected are viewed as important, thus contributing to a high questionnaire return rate

**Challenge: The intervention is being delivered by a different research team and independently evaluated by CEE**  
There is the potential for schools to get confused between which research team is responsible for which aspects of the project and a risk that the individual research teams will be unaware of the contact/discussions that each is having with individual schools.  
*Lessons learned:*

- It is essential that there are clear and frequent communications between key members of the two research teams
- This can be effectively achieved through regular email, conference calls and Skype calls

**Challenge: Conducting computer based testing in schools**  
*Lessons learned:*

- Computer based testing can be a more complex mode of administration compared to the more traditional pencil and paper based tests
- Its success depends on schools having sufficient computers, a dedicated technician and ample lead in time to ensure that the tests are downloaded and accessible
- The research team may need to provide more support to schools than would normally be required
- It may result in more missing data (as schools can find the testing more cumbersome to complete with all their students), which can cost both time and money as it the research team may be required to go back to schools to collect the missing data

**Challenge: Variability in teacher implementation of the intervention**  
*Lesson learned:*

- To enhance fidelity to treatment, a model which includes teacher cooperative engagement in the intervention design process can be implemented
- Using teacher involvement in the research design promotes more effective intervention implementation

### Current and recent projects

**A randomised controlled trial of Functional Family Therapy in Croydon (2014 – 2017)**  
Funder: ESRC

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Parent Engagement Project (2014-2016)**  
Funder: Education Endowment Foundation

**A cluster randomised controlled trial evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis of the Roots of Empathy schools-based programme on improving socio-emotional outcomes among 8-9 year olds in Northern Ireland (2011 - 2015)**  
Funder: National Institute of Health Research

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of Cancer Focus NI's smoking prevention programme among Year 9 pupils in Northern Ireland (2014-2015)**  
Funder: Public Health Agency

**The Wellbeing in Schools (WiSe) physical and mental health and wellbeing longitudinal survey of post primary children in Northern Ireland**  
Funder: Public Health Agency

**An evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of nurture provision in primary schools (2014-2015)**  
Funder: Department of Education, Northern Ireland

**A cluster randomised controlled trial evaluation of peer tutoring in secondary schools amongst Year 9 and Year 7 students in North Tyneside, England, UK (2013-15)**  
Funder: Education Endowment Fund

**A cluster randomised controlled trial evaluation of speech and language therapy in Wigan, Hull and Hertfordshire, England, UK (2013-15)**  
Funder: Education Endowment Fund

**Physically Active Lessons: A feasibility study (2013-2014)**  
Funder: Education Endowment Foundation

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Lifestart parenting programme (2008 – 2014)**  
Funder: Atlantic Philanthropies

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Mate-Tricks: An after-Schools Programme to promote Prosocial Behaviour (2008-2012)**  
Funder: Childhood Development Initiative

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of the Doodle Den Literacy After-school programme among 5-6 year olds in Tallaght, Dublin (2008-2012)**  
Funder: The Atlantic Philanthropies/Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs

**A randomised controlled trial evaluation of Bookstart+: A Bookgifting Programme for Families with a Two Year Old Child (2010)**  
Funder: Booktrust

### Further information

To find out more about the Centre or to download reports on our completed studies please visit [www.qub.ac.uk/cee](http://www.qub.ac.uk/cee)

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